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SPECIAL FEATURE | REQUIEM



# THE PASSING OF AN ASIAN GOLF LEGEND

*It is with sadness that I solemnly author this requiem to  
Conrado 'Conrad' Benitez II for ASIAN GOLF.*

*Conrad was born in war-torn Philippines on March 22,  
1945, right in the middle of the devastating Liberation of  
Manila. During a family 75th birthday celebration using the  
Zoom app this March 22nd, he experienced difficulty breathing  
and was rushed to St. Luke's Hospital in Quezon City. He passed  
away on March 28, 2020. It has been said that Conrad was "one of  
the true stalwarts of Asian golf" and a "giant in Philippine golf."*

■ BY JAMES G. PRUSA







## “An unassuming man - always professorial, but at once so humble, and almost shy in spite of both his and his family's fame.”

**B**est known in East Asia as the amiable President and Chief Executive Officer of the Orchard Golf and Country Club south of Metro Manila, over the years Conrad served as an elected leader of both the National Golf Association of the Philippines (NGAP) and Philippines Federation of Golf Clubs. He wore many hats concurrently serving as the President of the Philippines Women's University in Davao, Mindanao, head of the Philippines Psychological Corporation (PhilPsyCor), and Chairman of Unlad Resources Development Corp., the real estate holdings company.

An unassuming man – always professorial, but at once soft-spoken, humble, and almost shy in spite of both his and his family's fame. Yet one would never want to cross swords with him with any wrongful, unvirtuous approaches to business. Conrad was a successor of the revered Benitez clan in the Philippines and always acted with an enduring respect for his family's patriotic legacy. He treasured the contributions the Benitez family members made to the Philippines and fellow countrymen that go back in history to the Philippines Revolution. During the first democratic revolution in Asia the family risked life and treasure towards establishing Philippine independence from the Spanish Empire. Then for over a century Benitez' dedication to international diplomacy and education of the Filipino citizen became legend.

His great uncle and grandfather were key authors of the revolutionary and subsequent Philippines constitutions and

they also were founders of the University of the Philippines and the Philippines Women's University. Conrad inherited this fervent familial zeal for education and he brought that passion to the golf course industry in Asia. He embodied the virtues exemplified in golf and he traveled the globe playing famous golf links to study their design, operation and management – bringing back educational information to the Philippines. In this process he developed lifelong friendships that were a core of his expert network.

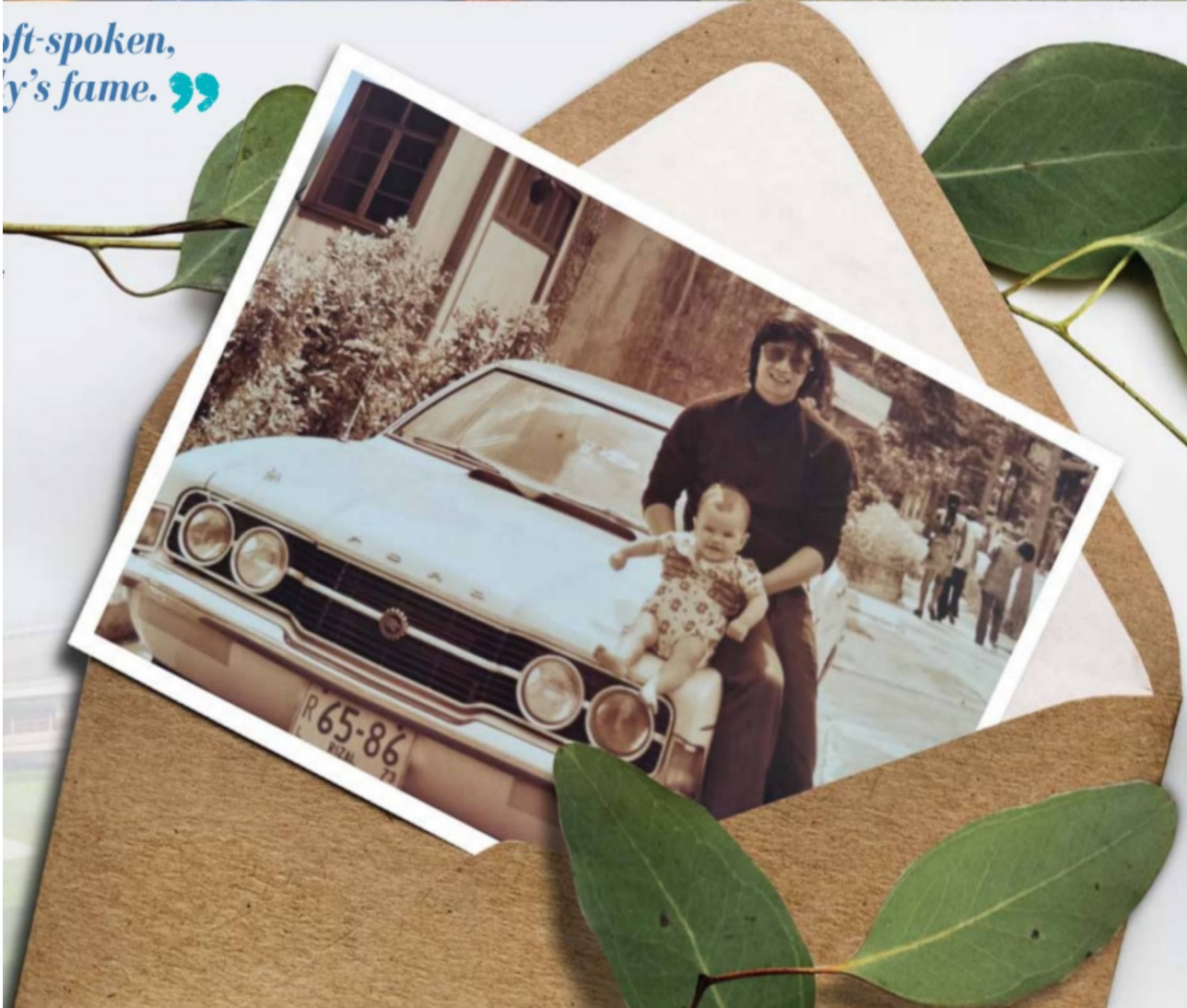
Conrad was introduced to golf very young, taking it up so he could be with other boys his age – he was the oldest child in a family with five younger sisters. He once told me that, **“My grandfather was a very avid golfer who played at least three times a week walking, there were no golf carts in Manila back then, until he died at age 80. I must have gotten hooked the same way he was.”**

In the early 1990s the Benitez family was approached by the Sta. Lucia golf course development group, two cousins Vicente Santos and Exequiel Robles who had taken the helm of their family company. Vicente and Exequiel offered to buy land, but then suggested a joint venture to expand the project to two golf courses. Conrad, being the only golfer in the Benitez clan, took the lead in the negotiation of the joint venture that became the Orchard G & CC. He chuckled when he once confessed to me that he advised the family to *“just sell the land and not take on risks of a joint venture.”* But the





Soft-spoken,  
y's fame. ☺☺







family matriarch, his famed aunt Dr. Helena Z. Benitez who had inherited the mango plantation from Conrad's grandfather, told him she wanted "to enjoy a little risk after my long life." Her decision finalized the venture that became the Orchard G & CC.

After working closely with partners Vicente and Exequiel, Conrad became very hands on in the design and construction of the famed Palmer and Player courses. He later drew on his vast golf network of personal relationships to establish professional education conferences and seminars to support the staff at the Orchard G&CC – and other course developers, owners, golf course superintendents and club managers.

Through our mutual love of golf, I simply became close friends with Conrad. We would often meet at venues around the world and in Manila to enjoy countless hours of intense discussions sharing our philosophies on how best to educate people to improve golf course management. Always persuasive, he easily convinced me to help with his objectives in the Philippines to develop Filipino professional golf course managers – rather than primarily resorting so often to foreign expats. Conrad knew golf course expertise required retention of educated university graduates, ongoing practical training, and continuing technical education. He also desired that other Filipino clubs and owners would see the wisdom to assure permanent Filipino resources for golf in the Philippines.

Conrad's aunt 'Tita Helen,' a Filipino senator, educator and respected international diplomate, influenced his life in so many ways. In 1957 Tita Helen responded to a request from Philippines President Ramon Magsaysay to organize the *Bayanihan Philippine National Folk Dance Company* to represent the Philippines in Expo '58 at the Brussels World Fair. Afterwards this traditional dance company became famous touring the world. One particular young lady amongst Tita Helen's Bayanihan cadre caught Conrad's eye -- and his heart. The charming Ruby Benitez soon after became his wife and lifelong partner.

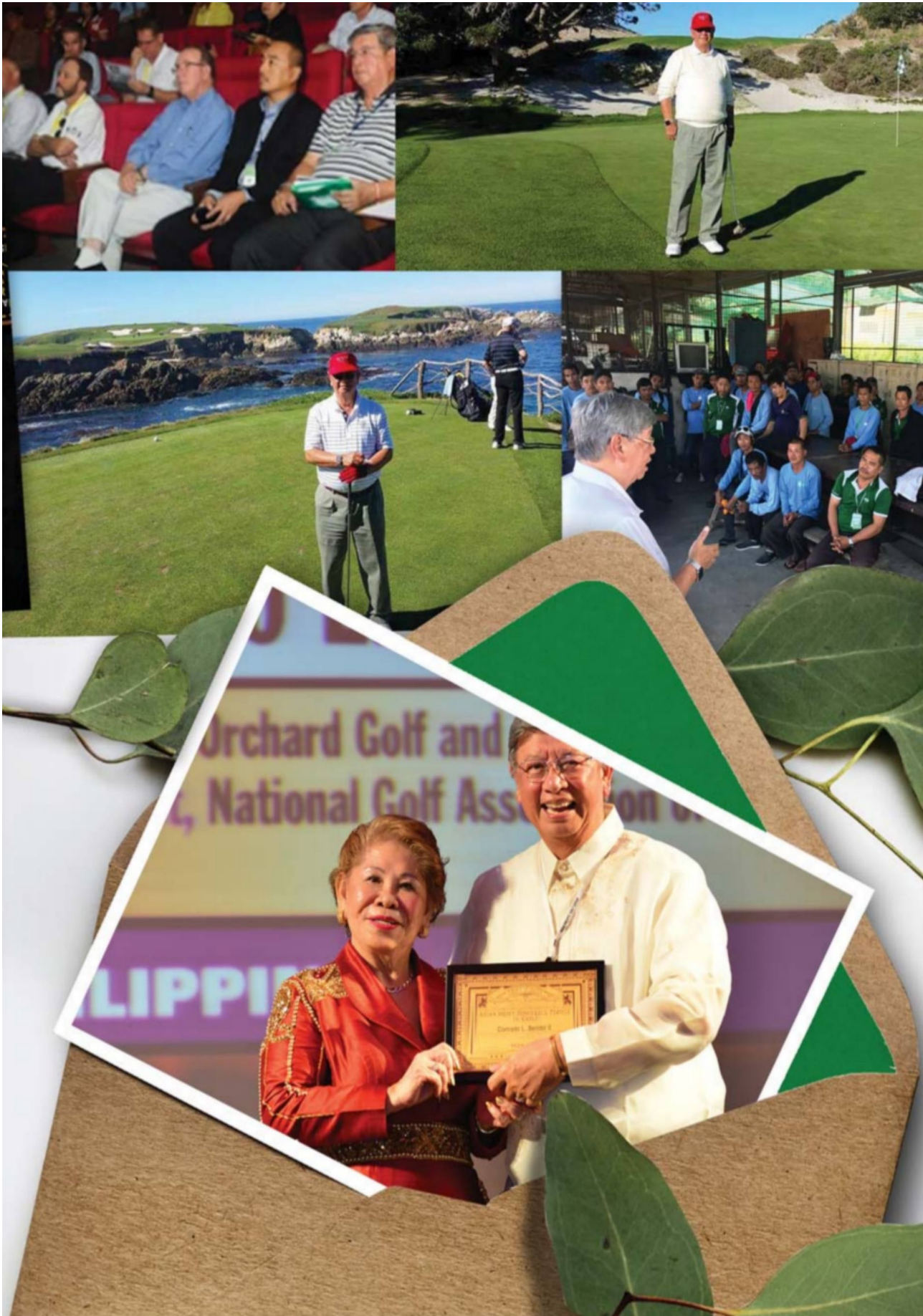
Conrad's greatest devotion was always first to his family. I saw the last several years taking a toll on him from many fronts, as he simultaneously renovated the Orchard G&CC, preserved family businesses, reinvigorated the Philippines Women's College in Davao, and more – any single one of which would have exhausted energy and shattered most men.

The General Manager of the Orchard G&CC, Nilo Famy (a grandson of the first Presidente of the Philippines, Emilio Aguinaldo y Famy) best summed up the feelings of Conrad's many business associates, worldwide friends, and of the Benitez family. Writing to me upon Conrad's passing, Nilo lamented:

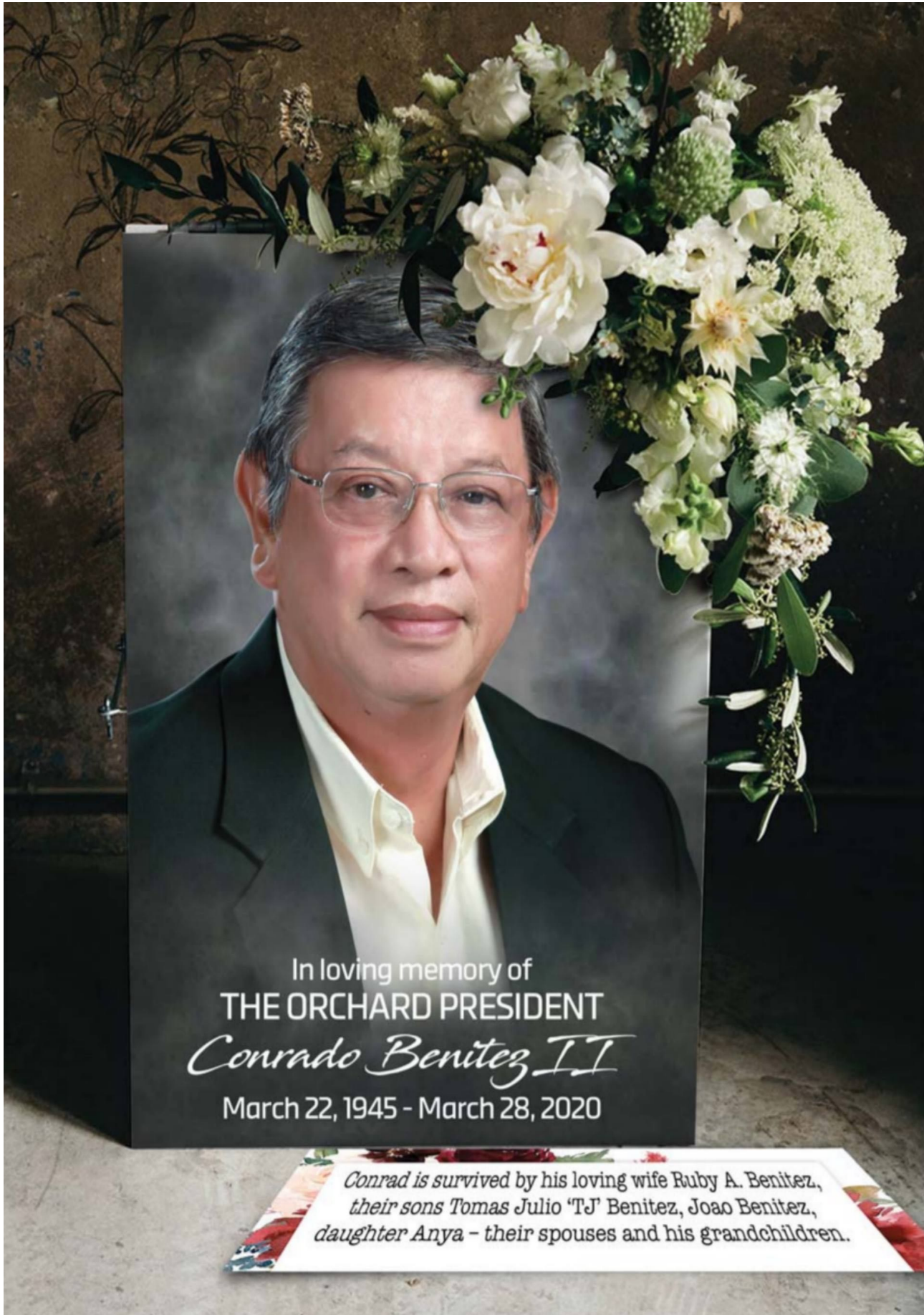
**"My heart is grieving and broken into pieces up to now."**

With those words I offer requiem to Conrad.









In loving memory of  
**THE ORCHARD PRESIDENT**  
*Conrado Benitez II*  
March 22, 1945 - March 28, 2020

*Conrad is survived by his loving wife Ruby A. Benitez,  
their sons Tomas Julio 'TJ' Benitez, Joao Benitez,  
daughter Anya - their spouses and his grandchildren.*